



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

from the pot. There were the little coffins—eight of them, and all empty. One was so much smaller than the others, that I concluded it must have contained a male. Very pretty things were these little cylindrical cases — the pupa coverings. (Fig. 34). At the thicker end a tiny lid was uplifted, much as if the sawn-off end of a cocoanut should serve as a lid to the shell, and should be raised to let out a captive bird.

So each having made for itself a little coffin had lain therein just thirteen days. “*Thirteen* days,” whispered a friend, a little superstitious about that number. “*Thirteen* days! The fault of their escape is not yours at all. It is a clear case of bad luck.” Well, my good friend, your theory is charitable at the least. But in my humble and penitent judgment, it does not condone the blunder which at the auspicious moment allowed the prize to fly away. Nature, like the Oracle, exacts of her inquirers watchful attention.

THE PRAIRIE BIRDS OF SOUTHERN ILLINOIS.

BY ROBERT RIDGWAY.

HAVING familiarized the readers of the NATURALIST to some extent with the general character and appearance of the prairies of Southern Illinois in our article on “The Woods and Prairies of the Upland Portions,” I shall now give an account of an ornithological reconnoissance of Fox Prairie, in Richland county, made in the summer of 1871. As this reconnoissance resulted in the discovery of several species of birds new to the state,* a few details concerning it may not be uninteresting to our readers. The field of our observations was a prairie of considerable extent, lying about four miles to the westward of the town of Olney, on the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad, and is merely one of the numerous arms or bays of the Grand Prairie which extend eastward into the forest region of the Wabash valley.

My companions and I arrived at it a little before noon, and saw before us the usual modern prairie prospect. A rolling plain spread away from us, the farther side bounded by the border of timber, while the prairie itself was treeless, except where some

* See AMERICAN NATURALIST, Vol. VI, July, p. 430.

stream was followed by a narrow line of thickets with a few large trees interspersed. Around us were the tangled thickets which we have before described, while the small, but growing trees which sprang up among them gave plain evidence of the gradual encroachment of the woods upon the original prairie. The herds of horses and cattle which dotted the gently undulating surface of the prairie, and an occasional neat frame farmhouse, with its attendant fields and orchard, made us realize that we were yet within the bounds of comfortable and advanced civilization. Just before us the prairie was intersected by a ravine, through which ran a small stream whose narrow valley was filled with a thicket of varied shrubbery, and the brook itself bordered by a few large-sized trees, which were chiefly the white elm, several kinds of oaks, and an occasional cottonwood.

The day was a delightful one; the sky without a cloud, and, though the heat ranged above 80°, the fresh prairie breeze tempered it to a delightful mildness. As we rested in the shade of a large elm tree in the hollow, and reclined on the cool soft sward, our ears were delighted by such a chorus of bird-songs as we have heard nowhere else. Among the leafy branches overhead the orioles (*Icterus Baltimore*) whistled their mellow flute-like notes, and the little greenlets (*Vireosylva gilva* and *V. olivacea*) cheered us with a softer warble or richer chant. The birds of the meadow were chanting their several ditties all around us on the open prairie, while the frequent soft refreshing prairie breeze wafted to us from the groves the songs of the woodland species.

In the tangled thickets and scrubby jungle near the border of the woods the finest songsters were found. There the mocking birds (*Mimus polyglottus*) fairly filled the air with their rich medley of inexhaustibly varied notes, the singers leaping in restless ecstasy from branch to branch, with drooping wings and spread tail, or flitting from thicket to thicket as they sang. The brown thrasher (*Harporhynchus rufus*) poured forth a sweet and ceaseless accompaniment, as he sat perched sedately upon the summit of a vine-canopied tree—a contrast in bearing to the restless, sportive *Mimus*, his rival in song. The yellow-breasted chat (*Icteria virens*), a very abundant and characteristic species, appeared to be straining himself to produce the oddest and most unusual notes he could invent, the singer often going through grotesque and extravagant antics—flitting upward, and then descending by jerks,

his wings and tail raised and legs dangling — the whole time singing with all his might. Mingled with these, the loudest songs, were heard the sweet sad chant of the little field sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*), the pleasant cheerful notes of the ground robin, or “che-wink” (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*), the rich whistlings of the cardinal grosbeak (*Cardinalis Virginianus*), and the glad “bob-white” of the quail (*Ortyx Virginianus*). During a lull in the chorus we heard, from the depths of the thicket, a very curious gabbling, or sputtering song, which was entirely new to us. We hastened to the thicket, and, entering it as far as possible, lay in wait for the strange songster to resume his vocal performance. In a few minutes a little grayish bird carefully approached, flitting cautiously from twig to twig, now and then halting, and, after uttering the peculiar notes which had attracted our attention, would stretch out his neck and eye us with great curiosity and evident suspicion. After observing him carefully to our satisfaction at a distance of hardly a rod, we found that he was Bell’s greenlet (*Vireo Bellii*), a species of the plains east of the Rocky Mountains from Texas northward, and not before detected east of the Mississippi river. After we had become satisfied of his identity we shot him; but upon attempting to secure our prize we found the briery undergrowth too intricate and powerful to allow a passage through it. In nearly all the thickets others of the same species were frequently heard, so that it appeared to be common in that locality. The little white-eyed greenlet (*V. noveboracensis*) was also common in the same thickets, and was easily distinguished by his well-known notes, an attempted translation of which gives it the local name of “chickty-beaver bird.” As we remained patiently watching for the specimen of Bell’s vireo, spoken of above, other little birds would now and then hop cautiously near us, or flit through the undergrowth before us. Among these were recognized the chestnut-sided warbler (*Dendroica pensylvanica*), the golden winged warbler (*Helminthophaga chrysoptera*), and a pair of mourning warblers (*Geothlypis philadelphia*). The first two species represent in the scantily wooded portions the caerulean warbler (*D. caerulea*) and the blue-winged yellow warbler (*H. pinus*) of the forests of the bottom-lands.

In the open groves at the border of the timber, the usual woodland species were noticed; and among them, the vermilion tanagers (*Pyrranga aestiva*) frequently warbled their robin-like, but

vigorous and well-sustained song, the blue jays (*Cyanura cristata*) squalled and chattered as they prowled among the branches; while the red-headed woodpeckers (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) frolicked among the trees. The most abundant bird besides the foregoing species was the tufted titmouse (*Lophophanes bicolor*), which nearly mimicked the jays in both habits and notes.

On the open prairie the birds were all entirely different. The meadow lark (*Sturnella magna*—the true *magna*, and not at all approaching *S. neglecta*, in either manners, notes or plumage!) was the most conspicuous, from its size and the plaintive sweetness of its song. The “dick sissel” (*Euspiza Americana*) was perhaps the most abundant bird, and the males were perched upon the tall coarse weeds all around us, chanting their vigorous but rude ditties. Henslow’s bunting (*Coturniculus Henslowi*) and the yellow-winged bunting (*C. passerinus*) were scarcely less abundant, and like the dick sissels were perched upon the tops of the weed-stalks, uttering their simple, abrupt lisping songs. Though we had never met with Henslow’s bunting before, we found it to be much more common here than the *C. passerinus*, and in a little while easily succeeded in securing seven fine specimens. At the edge of a pond we saw what we thought to be the *Passerculus savanna*, but the bird escaped by running into the grass after we had crippled it. Over the surface of the pond were flitting and hovering a couple of black terns (*Hydrochelidon fissipes*), while among the rushes and sedges of its border the red-winged blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*), and both species of marsh wrens (*Telmatodytes palustris* and *Cistothorus stellaris*), were nesting; and when away from the pond, we were certain that we heard the harsh grating notes of the yellow-headed blackbird (*Xanthocephalus icterocephalus*), well known to us, but we did not see this species there. In the grassy portions of the prairie the field plover (*Actiturus Bartramius*) was more or less common, and, except the killdeer (*Ægialitis vociferus*), was the only other species of the family observed there. The lark bunting (*Chondestes grammacus*) was more or less common about the border of the corn-fields and scattered groves along the edge of the prairie, and we listened to its vivacious and unusually vigorous song with more pleasure than we had felt upon hearing any other bird during the day, for we regard this bird as the finest singer of its family on the continent; its sprightly, remarkably continued song, having a peculiar emo-

tional trill in various parts, and such beautiful rising and falling cadences, in addition to its other pleasing qualities, that we consider it unequalled in these respects among all the numerous fringilline songsters of the United States. A frequent companion of this species was the indigo bird (*Cyanospiza cyanea*), and more rare one, the grass, or bay-winged bunting (*Pooecetes gramineus*). Besides the species named, but few birds were noticed that day, and these were the more generally distributed species, which are hardly worthy of mention, as the catbird (*Galeoscoptes Carolinensis*), red-bellied woodpecker (*Centurus Carolinus*), flicker (*Colaptes auratus*), and such species as are seen every day in nearly all localities. Once a pair of croaking ravens (*Corvus carnivorus*) made their appearance, and after circling about over the border of the woods for a few minutes, left for the heavy timber of Fox Creek bottoms. The red-tailed and red-shouldered hen hawks (*Buteo borealis* and *B. lineatus*) were occasionally seen, while now and then one or two swallow-tailed kites (*Nauclerus forficatus*) would be noticed floating about in broad circles in the clear blue sky, usually accompanied by the Mississippi kite (*Ictinia Missisippiensis*). The little sparrow falcon (*Tinnunculus sparverius*), the sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks (*Accipiter fuscus* and *A. Cooperii*), completed the list of birds of prey which we observed that day.

Early in August of the same summer we visited this locality a second time, and found its entire aspect changed. The season of severe drought having passed, we found a profusion of flowers giving a gay and varied color to the prairie, which before was comparatively brown and sober in the appearance of its vegetation. The birds which were most conspicuous were nearly all different from those noticed at our former visit. The mocking birds, brown thrashers and chats, were silent, while a few of the other singers occasionally cheered us with their song. The shrill screech of a very large species of Cicada repeatedly startled us as we brushed against a weed, while numerous varieties of grasshoppers were far more noisy than the birds, and seemed almost the only active beings during the sultry noontime of that cloudless day; for the thermometer stood in the nineties, although the heat was considerably tempered by a steady refreshing breeze. To compensate for this silence of the birds, however, as we came upon the open prairie, a beautiful and unlooked for sight attracted our

attention. Numbers of exquisitely graceful swallow-tailed kites or "snake hawks" (*Nauclerus forficatus*, also locally known as "fish-tail hawk") were seen sailing about in every direction; we were completely transfixed by the beautiful spectacle they presented as they floated about in graceful circles, while they were so unmindful of us as to pass repeatedly within a few yards of us. Soaring gracefully above them with a similar flight were smaller numbers of the "blue kite" (*Ictinia Mississippiensis*), which, more suspicious, seldom approached so near. The latter birds, though far less striking in appearance than the swallow-tails, were nevertheless superior to them in power of flight, for they had a very interesting habit of suddenly pitching downward from a great height almost to the ground, and again ascending by a steep angle nearly to the level from which they started; the whole performance accompanied without a single flap of the wings, which in the descent were merely extended at the elbows and inclined inwards at the tip, and the rapid fall checked by suddenly extending the wings, which were thus held motionless as the bird mounted again. Frequently two or three would pass each other at different angles as they performed these beautiful evolutions, and presented a sight pleasing and interesting in the extreme. The power of flight of these kites may be better appreciated by the fact that they frequently appeared and passed rapidly and easily by the turkey buzzards (*Cathartes aura*) which happened to be sailing majestically in the same direction. The swallow-tails were never noticed performing these evolutions; though for ease and grace their buoyant, floating flight certainly cannot be excelled.

The swallow-tails were so numerous and tame that once, when half a dozen or so were sailing about, we killed one with each barrel of our gun, in quick succession. A couple of full-grown young of this species were seen upon a dead tree along the stream, and while we were watching them the parent bird approached, evidently with food for them, for they commenced dancing up and down upon the branch, and whistled impatiently, when she hovered over them. The Mississippi kites would never approach us near enough for a shot, so that we found them far more difficult to shoot than the swallow-tails. The three specimens obtained we secured by stratagem; our most successful plan being to approach them in our wagon. These kites were frequently observed resting upon the tops of the dead trees along the stream, and by approach-

ing with the team until we were concealed for a moment by the intervening underwood, I would jump out and leave my companions to keep on with the wagon. While the unsuspecting kite was intently watching the passing team, I found it usually quite easy to steal through the thickets near enough to the tree to shoot it. In this manner I succeeded in shooting three fine specimens during the day.

While driving across the prairie, in the course of my hunt after these birds, I observed what appeared to be a Mississippi kite perched upon a dead tree in a bushy ravine. We approached it as described above, and as we drew nearer, we noticed something in its appearance which caused us to see that it was not an *Ictinia*. We were almost near enough to shoot from the wagon, when it flew, and began circling about, when it was immediately assaulted by two or three *Ictinias*, that continued to annoy it. When immediately overhead I shot at it, but without serious effect, for it immediately flew straight into a large elm tree in the ravine, and alighted among the branches. As it soared about above us I immediately recognized it as the *Asturina plagiata*, a species which is so strongly marked in all its characters, the plumage especially, that no other hawk could possibly be mistaken for it by one at all acquainted with this family. I succeeded in getting another shot at it, but the distance was so great that the bird escaped.

In this article I have named the more abundant and characteristic birds of the prairie portions of southern Illinois. Future observations, in such favorable localities as that explored by us, will no doubt reveal many additional, and perhaps several unlooked-for species, when we take into consideration the fact that my acquaintance with the prairie avi-fauna depends solely on these two trips. The number of species actually observed in the locality, numbered about ninety-five on each occasion; while the species breeding in the immediate neighborhood are about one hundred and forty, a very rich avi-fauna for a restricted locality, when the fact is taken into consideration, that of this number only about twenty-five are water birds—the remainder of one hundred and fifteen species of land birds being, perhaps, as large a number of regular summer residents as any single locality in North America can boast.